

THE AMERICAN VETERAN  
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SEGMENT TITLE: EYEGLASSES FOR HOMELESS

KANE FARABAUGH, HOST: WE TAKE YOU TO BALTIMORE WHERE A PILOT PROGRAM IS GIVING HOMELESS VETERANS EYE GLASSES AND A WHOLE NEW OUTLOOK ON LIFE.

REBA HOLLINGSWORTH, REPORTER: BILL TAYLOR'S JOB AT THE PERRY POINT VOCATIONAL SHOP OUTSIDE BALTIMORE JUST GOT A LOT CLEARER. NOT TOO LONG AGO, THE HOMELESS VETERAN COULD BARELY READ THE VERY ENVELOPES HE WAS SORTING.

BILL TAYLOR, MARINE CORPS & ARMY VETERAN: I COULD NOT READ. I COULDN'T READ SMALL PRINT

OPHTHAMOLOGIST: LET'S JUST PUT THESE GLASSES ON AND WE'LL CHECK YOUR VISION WITH THESE ON.

HOLLINGSWORTH: THANKS TO A PILOT PROGRAM THAT HELPS HOMELESS VETERANS GET FREE EYEGLASSES, BILL GOT A BRAND NEW PAIR.

OPHTHAMOLOGIST: CAN YOU READ THOSE LETTERS OUT THERE NOW?

TAYLOR (READING EYE CHART): FZBD4

HOLLINGSWORTH: AND HE'S ALREADY SEEING THE DIFFERENCE.

BILL TAYLOR: IT HELPS ME BECAUSE ON MY JOB SOMETIMES, I HAVE TO READ PEOPLE'S NAMES. I HAD TO BE ABLE TO MAKE SURE THE RIGHT CONTENTS GOES INTO THE ENVELOPE.

HOLLINGSWORTH: BILL SAYS HE OWES A LOT TO THIS WOMAN: PAT LANE. SHE'S THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE HEALTHCARE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM AT THE BALTIMORE V-A MEDICAL CENTER.

PAT LANE, LCSW-C, HOMELESS VETERAN PROGRAM: I MET MR. TAYLOR ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO. BILL WAS PRETTY DOWN ON HIS LUCK AT THAT POINT IN TIME. HE KNEW ABOUT THE EYE PROBLEM FOR THE MAJORITY OF THOSE TWO YEARS. HOWEVER, DUE TO HIS LIMITED INCOME, HE COULD GET AN EXAM, BUT HE COULDN'T GET A PAIR OF GLASSES.

OPHTHAMOLOGIST (TO TAYLOR): LET'S CHECK YOUR OTHER EYE HERE.

HOLLINGSWORTH: BALTIMORE IS ONE OF FIVE PILOT SITES AT V-A HOSPITALS ACROSS THE COUNTRY TESTING OUT THIS NEW PROGRAM TO HELP HOMELESS VETERANS SEE AGAIN.

OPHTHALMOLOGIST: AGAIN IS IT BETTER ONE OR TWO?

LANE: IN THE GENERAL INTAKE THAT WE DO WITH EACH VETERAN THAT COMES THROUGH THE HOMELESS PROGRAM, WE ASK A VARIETY OF QUESTIONS: EYE, DENTAL, MEDICAL. AND EYE PROBLEMS SEEMED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST CONSTANT PROBLEMS THAT ALL THE VETERANS PRESENTED. BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, WE COULD IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM, BUT DIDN'T HAVE A RESOURCE WITH WHICH TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM.

HOLLINGSWORTH: THAT'S BECAUSE ONLY SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABLED VETERANS OF 50 PERCENT OR MORE COULD GET BOTH THE EXAM AND THE EYEWEAR, LEAVING VETERANS LIKE BILL OUT OF LUCK.

LANE: I'VE HAD VETERANS BRING ME PRESCRIPTIONS THAT THEY WENT TO LENS CRAFTERS TWO, THREE, FOUR FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS. ON NO INCOME, OR AN EIGHT HUNDRED DOLLAR PER MONTH INCOME THAT WAS NOT A DOABLE SITUATION, SO THEY DID WITHOUT.

HOLLINGSWORTH: UNTIL NOW. THE OFFICE OF FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY INITIATIVES ASKED EACH PILOT SITE TO CREATE ITS OWN EYECARE PROGRAM FOR HOMELESS VETERANS. SO, BALTIMORE'S V-A HOSPITAL TEAMED UP WITH THE MARYLAND SOCIETY FOR SIGHT, A NON-PROFIT GROUP THAT PROVIDES GLASSES TO PEOPLE WHO CAN'T AFFORD THEM.

LANE: THE VA PROVIDES THE ACTUAL EYE EXAM, AND THEN AFTER THAT THE MARYLAND SOCIETY FOR SIGHT HAS GRACIOUSLY AGREED TO DONATE TEN PAIRS OF EYEGLASSES PER MONTH TO OUR VETERANS.

HOLLINGSWORTH: IN ONE YEAR, THIS BALTIMORE FACILITY HAS PROVIDED MORE THAN NINETY PAIRS OF GLASSES TO HOMELESS VETERANS LIKE LISA SAIA WHO'S GONE WITHOUT GLASSES FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I LIKE THIS, THOSE LOOK REALLY NICE ON YOU.

LISA SAIA, VETERAN: THEY HAD A GOOD VARIETY. I WAS VERY PLEASED. I COULD SEE AGAIN.

HOLLINGSWORTH: GETTING THEIR VISION BACK IS A BIG DEAL. PAT LANE SAYS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THIS PROGRAM, SHE'S SEEING AND HEARING ONE SUCCESS STORY AFTER ANOTHER.

LANE: ANYWHERE FROM "YOU'VE GIVEN ME BACK MY LIFE" TO "I KNOW WHAT BUS STOP TO GET OFF ON NOW." BUT I THINK THE BIGGEST ONE IS THE ADVANTAGES OF THEM BEING ABLE TO GAIN EMPLOYMENT. NOT HAVING THE STIGMA OF HAVING TO ASK, "COULD YOU TELL ME WHAT THIS SAYS?" NOW THEY CAN DO IT FOR THEMSELVES.

HOLLINGSWORTH: A LIFE OF INDEPENDENCE IS SOMETHING BILL TAYLOR ISN'T TAKING FOR GRANTED. SINCE AUGUST, HE'S NO LONGER HOMELESS AND HE'S WORKING A PART TIME JOB THROUGH V-A.

FARABAUGH: THE PROJECT IS CALLED THE "RESTORED VISION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS" PROGRAM. NOW BESIDES BALTIMORE, THE PILOT SITES ARE AT THE VA HOSPITALS IN ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA; FORT HARRISON, MONTANA; JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI; AND DES MOINES, IOWA. AND MORE ARE ON THE WAY.

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THE AMERICAN VETERAN IS PRODUCED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS